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AUTHOR	Sauvao, Malaeta F.
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ABSTRACT

Noting that the number of Samoan children in New Zealand receiving early childhood education in their heritage language has been increasing rapidly, this study examined the way the transition to primary school was organized for Aoga Amata (early childhood centers) children. Participating in the interview study were 39 parents, 14 teachers, 14 principals, and 20 children. Additional case study data were collected for 6 children. The findings indicated that parents had language and cultural reasons for enrolling their children at a local Aoga Amata. The parents, teachers, and principals of receiving schools viewed the Aoga Amata experience as valuable. Transition was managed by families and schools through several strategies: family assistance, assistance of other Samoan children at school, use of non-teaching staff who were Samoan speakers, and, in one school, a bilingual program. Some teachers and principals were concerned that the Aoga Amata did not provide written records regarding children and their development. Schools recognized the importance of language maintenance but, except for one school, could not provide bilingual education during the transition. Parents were aware of the family's role in achieving bilingualism and the school's role in English language development, but they were seeking ways to link the home and school through their children's language education. Based on findings, it was concluded that: (1) schools with English-only solutions to transition may not be properly appreciating the importance of language continuity in the education of bilingual children; (2) parents, teachers, and principals view transition from different perspectives; (3) language maintenance can proceed through many pathways; (4) new initiatives are needed to consider the role of language continuity in transition arrangements for Aoga Amata children; and (5) neither administrative nor professional continuity were in place at the majority of schools surveyed. (KB)

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Transition of Samoan Children from Aoga Amata to Primary School: Case Study in the Wellington Region

Paper Prepared for the Pacific Bilingual Conference (Ulimasao) 1-3 October 2002, at Alexandra Park, Greenlane, Auckland.

Le'autuli'ilagi Malaeta F. Sauvao
National Manager –Ta'ita'i Pasefika
Early Childhood Development

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Background Introduction

The rapid increase in the number of Samoan children receiving early childhood education in their heritage language through Aoga Amata movement prompted the researcher to examine how continuity is being handled during the transition to primary schooling.

Aim

The primary aim of the study was to gather information from parents, children, teachers and principals about the way the transition to school was organised for Aoga Amata children.

Sampling Procedures

I used the community network approach to gain access to a pool of twenty recent graduates of Aoga Amata and their receiving schools. In addition, I chose six children for case study purposes because of the interesting circumstances each child represented. Thirty-nine parents, fourteen teachers and fourteen principals completed the sample (total of 79).

Research Questions

The following five questions guide the research plan and the collection of data.

1. How do Samoan speaking children from Aoga Amata cope with the transition to primary schools?

2. What impact does the transition have on the children?

3. What are the parent's perceptions of Aoga Amata programmes and the management of the transition?

4. What are the teachers perceptions of the transition to primary schools?

5. What factors contribute to the maintenance of Samoan language in school?

In New Zealand, Maori communities established Te Kohanga Reo (Maori Language Nests) from 1982 onwards, and Pacific People later followed this pattern. From 1985 Samoan churches have been particularly active in this respect. For example, by 1997, seventy-six Aoga Anata association (SAASIA – Sosaiete A Aoga Amata I Aotearoa). Twenty were licensed as childcare centres and fifty were funded by the Early Childhood Development Unit (Burgess 1997).

The rapid increase in the establishment of Aoga Amata in New Zealand has been an important reason for the increased participation rates of Samoan children in early childhood education principles into Samoan homes, it also prepared the way for parents to reconsider the role of language and culture in the educational; development of their children.

Despite the movement being thirteen years old, very little has been recorded by ay of published material about the transition of Samoan children from Aoga Amata to primary schools. Moreover, as research student and teacher, I was interested to find out about the educational progress of Samoan children who had graduated from Aoga Amata. These two reasons provide the rationale for the present project.

My role as visiting lecturer and adviser for the Wellington Multicultural Educational Resource Centre from 1990 –1995 involved me in assisting teachers and children in respect to educational needs, resources and teaching and learning strategies. These visits covered the early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary sections of the educational system. During the visits to primary schools, I observed that some Samoan children who arrived from Aoga Amata had few difficulties in coping with their new primary school learning environment because they came with a sound basic knowledge of literacy, numeracy and proficient social skills. However, there were also some monolingual children (Samoan language speaking only) arriving from Aoga Amata who did experience initial difficulty in adjusting to the use of English in the junior classroom. The only help I observed during these visits was the provision of a person (usually another Samoan child such as a brother/sister/cousin) who was withdrawn from another class to assist the new child with his/her work.

RESULTS

Introduction

The transition to primary school by children who have attended Aoga Amata was studied through the eyes of the children and parents, as well as through the eyes of the teachers and principals of the receiving primary schools. Information was also gathered on the continuity between the Aoga Amata and the school kin terms of the Curriculum, language policies, and the factors that might be encouraging or constraining language maintenance.

Coping with Transition

The first research question addressed in the results is:

> How do Samoan speaking children from Aoga Amata cope with the transition to primary schools?

Two sources of information were used to answer this question: Information from parents and information from the receiving teachers. The parents were asked to recall the affective responses of their child during the transition, especially to a change of language where this occurred. Teachers were asked to recall their concerns and how they responded to those concerns. They were also asked to recall how the child coped with changes in the language of instruction.

Affective Responses from Parents

The thirty-nine parents had had the experience of at least one of their children making the transition from Aoga Amata to school. Their recollection of the transitional experience varied according to the language policy of the school. Where the receiving teacher was Samoan and where Samoan was used as the language of the classroom, positive recollections of the experience were expressed. For instance, one parent reported:

> *He enjoyed school because he had a Samoan teacher and he was also in a Samoan class, which linked his Aoga Amta experience. He did not find it difficult to settle into his new school.*

In contrast, children who were received into an English only classroom were remembered as being diffident, anxious, withdrawn, uncomfortable and slow to respond to the class programme. As one parent said:

> *Puipuiau found it difficult to understand English, as she was not used to listening to it being spoken. The different concepts of the English language were all new to her. She was brought up in the Samoan language only. I found it difficult to understand or assist her in her schoolwork because she did not understand the tasks to be done. Her incompetence in English slowed her progress for almost a year.*

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Concerns of Teachers

Of the fourteen teachers interviewed three were Samoan teachers who had used Samoan as the language of interaction with the graduates from the Aoga Amata. Of the eleven non-Samoan teachers, only two expressed concerns about the transition of the Aoga Amata children to their classes. The concerns mentioned by these two teachers were of three kinds:

i. The Aoga Amata did not assist the transition process.

For example, the lack of information on the children and their accomplishments was noted as *Teacher 1* reported:

> *We did not have any records from the Aoga Amata, so we know what learning strengths the child has on entry to school and also social skills and strategies that work in changing behaviour.*

Similarly *Teacher 2* explained:

> *No records of children's progress was received and it was difficult to identify learning needs. All pre-school records help us place new entrants into appropriate levels for learning.*

ii. Lack of Samoan speakers in the staff.

The school was not able to assist in the transition because there were no Samoan speakers on the staff.

> *If we had resources we believe it is important to support children's first language. It is not feasible to teach Samoan language with no Samoan staff members. We rely on parents help only (Teacher 3).*

The number of Samoan speaking children on the school role did not warrant (the provision) of extra resources.

> *Insufficient number of Samoan speaking children to justify additional funding to provide Samoan as a language option (Teacher 4).*

The remaining eight teachers did not perceive children from the Aoga Amata as having any particular difficulties with the transition. They expressed satisfaction with the social, cognitive and literacy development of the children, *Teacher 5* said:

> *Snadia is a mature caring warm young person who displays cooperative behaviour, patience, diligence and a desire to achieve that is well beyond her years. She is an intelligent student with an inquiring mind and a very able mathematician. The only skill that is still lacking in Snadia is the lack of confidence in her communicative skills where she shows a reluctance to contribute to classroom discussions.*

Another teacher said:

Aso is a fast fluent reader, works hard, and uses meaning well, good at figuring out what she doesn't know. Because she is such a fast thinker, she sometimes gets bored waiting for others (*Teacher 6).*

When the teachers were asked to compare Aoga Amata children to those who had been to other services, there were no comments (that indicated that children from the other Aoga Amata were being perceived as essentially different from children with other kinds of early childhood educational experiences. Two of the fourteen teachers said:

> *I have children from kindergarten and other pre-schools and they perform "positively" as those from Aoga Amata.*

Transition Strategies

A number of transition strategies were mentioned by the parents and teachers. Some of the strategies are as follows:

i. Accompanying the child to school

Most families used a family member, usually the mother or father, to accompany the child to school and to bring the child home after school. This family member usually stayed with the child on the first day in the class for the morning and in some cases the whole day. One mother said:

> *Because J... is our only child, I stayed with her in school, for the whole day till school finished.*

ii. Using an older brother, sister or cousin

Eight schools encouraged a member of the child's family within the school to spend time with the child in class. This procedure sometimes lasted for one or two days.

iii. Using a Samoan language teacher

One school provided a Samoan language new entrant class as part of the school's provision for Samoan children. The class was taught by a native speaker of Samoan and was available for children in the first two years at school.

iv. Special provision of cultural groups

Five groups provided Kapa Haka/Polynesian club to assist the cultural identity of Samoan children. These cultural activities are carried out once a week for some schools and once a month in other schools.

v. No special provision

Five of fourteen schools did not have a particular strategy for easing the transition of children from Aoga Amata.

In summary, children who were able to join a class where Samoan was being used as the language of the classroom made the transition easily from Aoga Amata to school. Where no special language provision was available, parents experienced more concerns than the teachers did. The parents would have preferred a Samoan language class for the children, but conceded that then children quickly made the transition to English with relative ease, especially where other family members were able to spend time with the child during the transition period.

Perceptions of the Aoga Amata Programmes

The third research question addressed the perceptions that parents, teachers and principals had concerning the objectives, Curriculum and management of the Aoga Amata movement.

Parents were asked to describe the reasons for sending their children to an Aoga Amata and to recall the accomplishments that they noticed in their children as a result of their Aoga Amata experience. There were also questions that probed the continuity of the Aoga Amata programme with the experience provided by the home. A contrast was sought between the development of children who attended the Aoga Amata and the children within the same family that either attended another early childhood education ser vice, or had remained at home with caregivers.

Reasons

The most common reason advanced for sending children to the Aoga Amata was to accelerate the development of the Samoan language and to learn Samoan cultural values. Second, parents sent their children to the Aoga Amata because the fees were usually lower than those charged by other early childhood education services. Third, there was a general desire to support the church in its wider activities. Fourth, some families found the service convenient. It was close

to home, a family member worked there, or close neighbours sent their children there.

In talking about the Aoga Amata experience, parents mentioned the way their children brought accomplishments home from the centre. For example they sang a new form of song, they initiated literacy experiences with family members, they brought home things they has made such as poem cards and their art and craft work. There was also continuity between home experience and the Aoga Amata programme. Children brought things from home to the centre: food, favourite books, toys and clothes for the home corner.

Contrast

Four family interviews provided the opportunity to contrast the experience of Aoga Amata children with those children who had remained at home. Children who stayed at home did not appear to receive the literacy advantage of attending an Aoga Amata. Their confidence in using Samoan was judged to be less developed in children who had had the experience of using Samoan was in other settings. Their cultural understandings were also judged to be less noticeable than brothers or sisters who has gone to Aoga Amata, as three parents stated.

P2

Simi was more advanced in his reading and other subjects than his older brothers. He was curious to find out answers to his school homework.

P3

Tolofi was more advanced in reading and she showed better development. She had an inquiring mind and often asked questions about her schoolwork.

P4

Talia is more polite than our children who did not attend Aoga Amata. He usually says his grace before family meals.

Four families were able to contrast the development of their children under an Aoga Amata and a kindergarten garden. Three of these families ' comments on the confidence and assurance of the children who had attended Aoga Amata are stated below:

P6

Malia learnt to write her name in Aoga Amata and could read the Samoan alphabet but her older brother only learnt this at school.

P8

Our older children attended the kindergarten, as there was no Aoga Amata in our suburb in those days. We noticed the difference between the older ones and the younger son who attended Aoga Amata. The younger one showed a respectful

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attitude in the home and he had the confidence to say the prayer during meal times and evening lotu.

Most parents provided two or three reasons of support of the decision to send their children to Aoga Amata.

P9

We wanted to learn the Samoan language and for her to know the culture. Simi's mother teaches at the Aoga Amata so it was easy for them to go together there.

Where two or three reasons were given, the Samoan language advantage usually preceded reasons of convenience.

Curriculum

In recalling the development of their children over the Aoga Amata years, parents invariably mentioned emerging literacy and numeracy accomplishments, such as reciting the Samoan alphabet, the child's name, recognising common words, and reciting poems and counting.

The acquisition of literacy and numeracy knowledge wee the areas of first mention, closely followed by comments on the Samoan language development of the children, using terms such as confidence, fluency, and assertiveness. Vocabulary knowledge was also mentioned such as colour, shape words, and names of animals. The ability to sing the lotu, to initiate traditional language games, and to use Samoan foe a wide range of functions were also mentioned.

Cultural experiences were interpreted in terms of politeness and the practise of respect, spiritual experience was linked to the close relationship between the Aoga Amata and Sunday schools. Less frequently mentioned were the experiences with play, the environment and literacy experiences in English.

The quotations below are representative of the comments received from the parents.

P10

Fetolofi spoke fluent Samoan and she achieved first place in our church's Sunday school.

P11

Sometimes Jane refuses to have someone show or tell her letters of the Samoan alphabet. She shows keenness to identify the letters of the alphabet for herself, if she is interested. Other times, if she's asked to read the alphabet, she is reluctant especially when she is watching television.

Transition to Primary School

The forth area of focus of the study was on teachers' perception of the transition to primary school of children of the Aoga Amata. There were four questions in the interview schedule that addressed the issue:

i. How did the child cope with the language f instruction during the first few weeks at primary school?

ii. How was help given to the child during the period of adjustment to an English only curriculum?

iii. What provisions were available for advancing Samoan language development?

A major purpose of the questions was to establish how teachers were Constructing the Aoga Amata experiences as a factor in the decisions that the school was making.

Coping with the Transition

Of the fourteen teachers interviewed, only two teachers were native speakers of Samoan. One of the teachers was teaching in the bilingual new entrants programme and received the graduates from the Aoga Amata attached to the school. The second teacher once taught Samoan "once a month" to the Samoan children in the school, including children from the Aoga Amata.

The Samoan researcher in the bilingual class viewed her programme as an extension of the Aoga Amata programme but with the added responsibility of continuing the acquisition of literacy and mathematic knowledge in a systematic way. The presence of the Aoga Amata on the school grounds contributed to the familiarity of the Aoga Amata children with the school facilities. They had met their teacher many times at the Aoga Amata and she had the opportunity to participate in experiences with the children who were about to enter her class. There was also professional contact between Aoga Amata teachers and the new entrants' teacher. Discussions had ranged over book experiences, mathematics activities, and imaginative experiences. Resources were shared and the exchange of views occurred in respect to the development of writing.

Teacher 12 commented;

> *Leave the writing to me the primary school teacher. This is my job; teaching the children how to write. It is often difficult to try and correct the children when they come to school already familiar with the incorrect letter formation in writing.*

The second Samoan teacher assisted in the new entrant class and helped with the adjustment of the newly arrived children from the Aoga Amata. She remarked on the social maturity of the children and the confidence in activities where they were able to use Samoan and cultural knowledge.

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The children from Aoga Amata were usually confident to tell news from their homes during morning talks. The news was told in Samoan. They liked to sing and recite their memory verses for White Sunday in school. Similarly, they used Samoan language to interact in their games and mathematical activities (Teacher 13).

Eleven of the teachers viewed the Aoga Amata experience as valuable and were able to mention qualities they saw in children who had graduated from the Aoga Amata. As one teacher said *"they came with good social and literacy skills' (Teacher 14).* Similarly another teacher remarked, *"Tue is a pleasant child who often offers to help in class. He is progressing well in his maths and appearing and outstanding class leader" (Teacher 11).* Only one teacher had reservations about the Aoga Amata experience, as she understood it in the context of only one child. She mentioned the lack of information about the development of the child and was not aware of any attempts to address the child's particular needs in the Aoga Amata programme.

No, I don't think the Aoga Amata has helped him. There was no record of his development kept and he does not need a bilingual programme because he is a fluent English speaker' (Teacher 9).

Facilitating the Transition

Where Aoga Amata children were being enrolled in an English-only classroom, the most common form of assistance was the use of older Samoan speaking children who were related to the children concerned, or well known to the children. Here special helpers were withdrawn from their own classes to spend up to two hours a day with the children. This arrangement lasted for two days, or a week or two, and on one occasion as long as month. On parent said,

His older brother in the senior class stayed with him for a while until he was happy to join other children in the class activities.

Teachers also mentioned the role of parents and relatives. They would bring the children to school, stay with them for a while in the classroom, and perhaps come early to be with them at the end of the day. On some occasions, caregivers spent the entire day with their children during the initial weeks of school. This arrangement was used frequently by mothers who had only one child. The mother commented,

Because we only have one child, I stay at school with her till school finishes and then we go home together.

Two schools used non-teaching staff who were speakers of Samoan to assist with the transition. Typically they would come into the class on the request of the teachers when language assistance was needed.

Provision for language maintenance

Children from the Aoga Amata are bilingual in at least two senses of the recruit

a. They ate monolingual speakers of a Samoan in an English language speaking environment

b. They have two first languages, Samoan and English.

The New English Curriculum Statement (Ministry of Education, 1996) specifically directs that the language of a child's home have a place in the curriculum. The *Taiala,* (Ministry of Education, 1996) provides curriculum guidelines for the development of proficiency in Samoan across eight levels. In the present study, there was a wide variation in the way that these documents were directing language programmes in the primary schools of the teachers interviewed.
One school, as discussed above, had a Samoan bilingual class that a child could be enrolled in for two years. One school had a teacher who met Samoan speaking children from the new entrants class once a month with other Samoan speaking children in the school. In all, there were sixty-seven children in one space and (his teacher commented on the difficulties she encountered with this arrangement.

> *Having sixty-seven children in one room with only two teachers for pacific islands studies or cultural activities is absolutely poor management and a very unfair way of meeting needs of these children. It all goes does to availability of funds.*

Some schools viewed their language maintenance as obligations as met through the provision of Polynesian clubs, Kapa Haka, and a Social Studies Programme integrated with Pacific Studies, as one principal commented,

> *We have no Samoan classes but we integrate our Social studies programmes with the Pacific Studies. The school has a Polynesian club where children from the pacific participate using their own language through songs and dances.*

At least three schools disclaimed responsibilities for language maintenance citing the pragmatic difficulties of meeting the language needs of all their non-native speakers of English. As one principal put it:

> *This school has a lot of children from other ethnic groups. We concentrate on the teaching of English and the parents know this. In Wellington, they have a choice of Newtown, Mt. Cook, Brooklyn or Strathmore (Principal 1).*

Unlike the above principal who sees the maintenance of the Samoan language as an issue for the school, the second principal expressed an interest in doing this work provided funding was available.

> *We would like to provide Samoan language classes but the lack of human resources and prevented this (Principal 2).*

This arrangement was further supported by claims that parents wanted the responsibility for language maintenance to be with the home and the church, with the school assuming responsibility for English language development.

Teachers, perceptions of progress

All bur one of the teachers in the sample viewed the Aoga Amata children positively when asked to comment on their progress.

When asked to be more specific, teachers mentioned the performance of children during book experiences and during mathematics as being particularly pleasing, especially when compared to the performance of children who did not attend an early childhood education centre. One teacher commented,

> *I had no difficulty with Aoga Amata children. They appeared very confident and very well settled in their first few days of school. Some non-Aoga Amata new enrolments seemed timid and reluctant to socialise.*

The results concerning children's competencies are consistent with the findings of the study of New Zealand five year olds by Wylie (1996).

The one teacher with reservations was not so sure of the value of Aoga Amata experience in the context of the general development needs of the child concerned.

Factors Affecting Samoan Language Maintenance

The last research question addressed in the interviews concerned the factors that were perceived to be contributing to the maintenance of Samoan. When parents gave their views they stressed the role of the home, the church, and other community initiatives. Of special mention was the role of grandparents, and other relatives that might be living with the family. The opportunity to take a child to Samoa and live in a village environment for a short period of time was also mentioned.

The parents also saw the school as having an important role. Without exception, the parents interviewed wanted the school to have a Samoan language programme following the principals of the *Taiala*. They had sent their children to an Aoga Amata to consolidate their children's Samoan language proficiency and would welcome the school finding a role for Samoan in their children's education. The parents were committed to bilingualism, but wanted English and Samoan to be acknowledged as the first language of their children.

Parents who spoke different heritage languages agreed that Samoan was important in the development of their children for cultural and spiritual reasons. The language was seen as the basis for developing values such as respect, reciprocity, and concepts of obligation.

The teachers and the principals saw the maintenance of Samoan as "desirable" but frequently cited funding, and human resourcing arguments to justify the lack of provision in their schools for language maintenance.

Two principals argues that Samoan parents wanted to have the responsibility of teaching Samoan to their children, thereby freeing the school to concentrate on English and the other elements of the curriculum. It should be noted however that the parents who were sending their children to that school did not express this view to the researcher during the interviews.

Summary and Discussion

Thirty-nine parents, fourteen teachers and fourteen principals gave their perceptions of how the transition from Aoga Amata primary schools impacted on children and was managed by receiving teachers. Language and cultural reasons were put forward by parents for enrolling their children at a local Aoga Amata. The parents as well as teachers and principal of the receiving schools viewed the Aoga Amata experience as valuable. The transition was managed by the families and the schools using a variety of strategies: family assistance, the assistance of other Samoan children at the school, the use of non-teaching staff who were speakers of Samoan, and in one school through the bilingual programme. The Aoga Amata did not however provide written records o the children and their development, a point emphasised by some teachers and school principals.

Schools recognised the importance of language maintenance, but except in one case were not able to provide bilingual education during the transitional period. Parents were able to articulate their desires to have children grow up bilingually in New Zealand. They were well aware of the family's role in achieving bilingualism and the school's role in English language development, but the families were seeking new initiatives to link the home and the school through the language education of their children.

Main Findings from the Interviews

Five topics were addressed in the study: coping with the transition to school; the impact of transition practises on children; the perceived quality of Aoga Amata programmes; teacher perceptions of Aoga Amata children, the school provisions for language maintenance. The perceptions obtained from the stakeholders during the interviews are summarized below.

Coping with the Transition

The way Aoga Amata children coped with the transition to primary school depended on the way issues of continuity were addressed by the school and the families concerned. The main strategies used by schools to address continuity include the provision of a bilingual programme; (ii) the provision of in class language support through various measures; (iii) the provision of adjunct

programmes; and (iv) or by displacing the responsibility for community onto neighbouring schools, parents, and even the Aoga Amata movement itself.

Only one of the fourteen receiving schools specifically addressed the continuity of educational experiences. This school employed a native speaker of Samoan in the junior school and established a Samoan- English bilingual programme. One consequence of the bilingual provision was that all children interviewed from this school were able to interact with the Samoan researcher in Samoan throughout the interviews and during the performance tasks.

Another school used a native speaker of Samoan in the receiving class within an English medium programme. This arrangement enabled one element of continuity to be present. Children from the Aoga Amata could converse with the teacher in Samoan during activities. Samoan was used on these occasions as a language of explanation and control. Samoan was also used in interaction with the children's parents.

The remaining twelve schools either employed arrangements or did not specifically address the continuity issue. For example, one school used a non-teaching member of school staff to clarify information with parents and on occasions with a child. Two schools used Samoan speaking children from other classes to be with the new entrant for one or two days during the initial transition period. Parents were also encouraged by some schools to remain with their children during the first few days in the new school.

At the second level of analysis, schools addressed the issue of continuity through adjustment programmes, such as incorporating culturally relevant units of work into the curriculum (three schools); Samoan language programme in the middle school which operated once a month (one school) and through the establishment of Polynesian cultural clubs (four schools).

Language maintenance is only one element in the continuity between early childhood educations, the family, and school. The nature of the contact between parents and school, and the type of curriculum experienced by children are two additional elements. In the present study, parents were able to interact with staff at the Aoga Amata on a daily basis both socially and professionally as they came to pick up their children. With the exception of the bilingual class, this situation changed dramatically for many parents when children began primary school. Most parents collected their children by waiting outside the class or even the school without the informal social interaction with their teacher.

Only one school directly fostered continuity of the curriculum. In this school (with an Aoga Amata on the school grounds), there was professional contact between the Aoga Amata teachers and the teacher of the bilingual class. The remaining schools did not report any professional contact with the Aoga Amata in their districts.

Impact on Children

Children survive arrangements that from many perspectives are less than ideal. But they do so at a cost. For example, Aoga Amata children who go into an English only programmes mark time in the literacy development as proficiently in English is established. On average, the children in the present study had received two years of early literacy development in Samoan. In the bilingual programmes, literacy in Samoan continued for a further two years as English literacy was established. In such a case, the pedagogical problem was for English literature to 'catch up' to a continually expanding Samoan literacy, effectively 'losing' two years of literacy development.

Eleven of the fourteen teachers reported that English language development and literacy in English developed quickly in Aoga Amata children. This observation however should not be used as a justification for discontinuing Samoan as a language for learning in Education. It is the view of the researcher that up to two years of literacy development was lost when Samoan was discontinued as the language of instruction.

Security in cultural identity, and positive concepts of self efficacy were noticed in Aoga Amata children by almost all the parents, teachers an principals, thereby suggesting that these characteristics were tangible outcomes of the Aoga Amata experience.

Aoga Amata Programmes

Parents were conservative yet critical in the views of the curriculum that their children were experiencing in an Aoga Amata. The need to expose children in Samoan cultural values, the importance of organization in the curriculum, and an expectation that children would progress in literacy and numeracy, together shaped the comments that parents made about Aoga Amata programmes.

The most frequently cited reason for sending children to an Aoga Amata was to learn the culture and maintain the Samoan language. However parents usually had more than one reason for sending their children to Aoga Amata.

Typical of the critical views about the organization of the curriculum was a comment about the lack of organised programmes in the afternoon sessions, where the Aoga Amata catered for older children. "For artwork, teachers and parents did most of the children's colouring and painting. Lack of discipline, children kept running around indoors". Three parents suggested that a more organised programme would be beneficial and even raised the issue of the need for more qualified and experienced staff.

It should be remembered that the observations made by the parents in the sample referred to in an early period in the Aoga Amata movement. Considerable professional effort has been spent in enhancing the quality of Aoga Amata programmes, both through the use of the national curriculum documents (Te Whaariki and Taiala) and through the diversification of qualification pathways. Teacher education courses are available through the Aoga Amata training Institutes as well as through colleges of education, polytechnics and universities.

In principle, licensed Aoga Amata should have little difficulty in obtaining professional assistance for establishing continuity in the curriculum with their local primary schools, apart from the language instruction issue.

Teachers Perceptions

Teachers generally perceived the Aoga Amata experience as helpful in education development of children. Compared to children who attended other early childhood educational centres, or remained at home, children who had attended Aoga Amata were perceived by ten of the fourteen teachers as having more developed literacy, numeracy and social skills. The remaining teachers were neutral on this issue. In the latter cases, pupils came from a variety of early childhood education centres and the four teachers could perceive little difference, between Aoga Amata children and children from other services.

On occasions, teacher's perceptions were confounded with language issues. The competency of Aoga Amata children was sometimes viewed as being compromised by the lack of English language proficiency. The child is competent but she doesn't take part in discussion. In such cases, the teachers appeared to be

overlooking the fact that it was not the child's fault that the language of instruction has changed.

Language Maintenance

Schools varied in the position they took on language maintenance and on the actions that they were prepared to take. Lack of funding, lack of trained Samoan teachers and the number of first languages spoken at the school were frequently cited as reasons for English only programmes. The view that the school's cultural activities were appropriate and sufficient was additional reasons given for an absence of language maintenance.

The factors constraining provisions for language maintenance in school policies were objectively true. Some class rolls contained children from five or more different language backgrounds. In most schools there were no native speakers of Samoan on the staff. The Samoan parents of one school in fact wanted English only programmes. In order to address such issues for Samoan children, new partnerships will need to be formed.

Main Findings from Case Studies

The six case studies complimented the interview data by tracing the consequences of attending an Aoga Amata and then being received into a primary school with particular transition arrangements and particular views, on the language maintenance issue.

If we accept the qualitative assessments by teachers as a basis for making a judgement and particular transition arrangements, then continuity of curriculum and language of instruction would seem to be the most successful of the arrangements (case studies one and two). Here the two children were members of the bilingual class that had a close association with Aoga Amata. The use of the Taiala and Te Whaariki in Aoga Amata, as well as the frequent contacts with the junior class teacher ensured continuity in the educational activities that the children were experiencing during the transitional period.

When children moved from Aoga Amata primary school without continued language support, there was an agreement amongst the child's parents, teachers and principals that the child's progress was compromised, at least in the early stages of the transition (case studies three to four). These children, however, were seen to overcome the disadvantage of the language switch relatively quickly, suggesting that continuity in the curriculum was at least beneficial to the children.

Case study five demonstrated that certain home factors might be important for language maintenance when the child is being educated in an English-only programme. The importance of the role of the grandparents and the church were underlined in the case study, as was the importance of having a home language policy observed by both parents.

The disappointing progress made by the child in case study six, was attributed by the parents to a number of geographical shifts that the family had been required to make.

From the case studies, it would appear that some language continuity is necessary for the full benefits of the Aoga Amata experience to be achieved. Where language continuity cannot be provided at school, both curriculum continuity and home language policies may sufficient for ensuring the regular educational development of Aoga Amata children.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the interviews and the case studies, a number off conclusions can be reached.

i. Schools with English-only solutions to the transition requirements of the Aoga Amata children may not be properly appreciating the importance of language continuity in the education of bilingual children. The one school with a bilingual solution to the transition problem provides an example of what could be achieved given the will of the community and the policy initiative of the school. Where English-only solutions were in place, the importance of language continuity appeared to be devalued in the education of Aoga Amata graduates.

ii. parents, teachers, and principals viewed the transition from different perspectives. Parents generally saw Samoan language development as an important part of their child's education and firmly believed that the Aoga Amata experience was a better option for their children than attendance at other kinds of early childhood centres. Teachers in English-only programmes, however, saw little difference between Aoga Amata children and kindergarten children, showing that curriculum continuity was uppermost in their minds. In such schools, principals would usually advance administrative reasons as to why language continuity could not be fully achieved in their programmes. In only one school was their convergence of views as the importance of language continuity.

iii. language maintenance can proceed through many pathways. However, in the present study, only one school was included in the pathway. For Aoga Amata children attending the thirteen other schools surveyed, the pathway was confined to the children's homes, networks in the community, and the church.

iv. If schools are to consider seriously the role of language continuity in the transition arrangements for Aoga Amata children, there will be new initiatives in the resourcing of schools, the training of staff, and the development of school language policies. Only one of the fourteen schools in the present study appeared to take full advantage of the possibilities under present regulations and teacher training opportunities.

v. The survey showed that both the administrative and professional continuity was not in place in the majority of the schools surveyed. Clearly this is a matter of urgency if the situation is still existing. Both the Aoga Amata and the primary schools have responsibilities for the coordination of the education of children who choose to attend an early childhood education service in their home language.

Limitations

It is important to mention that the results of the study were obtained from a small sample of primary schools (n-14) and children (n-20) and therefore we ought to be very cautious about making generalisations based on the results.

Every attempt was made to use culturally sensitive approaches to data collection. However, families and school staff were busy and had many calls on their time. Cultural events such as weddings, birthday celebrations, funerals and overseas travel frequently disrupted the flow of arrangements for interviewing people. On occasions, interviews became questionnaires, which in turn required clarification. These were not serious issues as the data involved recollecting experiences of the transition to primary school.

Implications for transition programmes

Based on the perceptions of the various stakeholders in the present study, there are a number of initiatiyes that could ease the transition from Aoga Amata to primary school for Samoan children.

First there is a need to develop a goal for transition practises that is shared by staff at the Aoga Amata, parents, and teachers at the receiving school. In setting the goals, there will need to be a shared understanding of what is meant by transition to school and an awareness of the costs of not achieving continuity of experiences in a child's life. The present study showed a low emphasis was placed on the child's home language for education.

Concluding Thoughts

A lack of an agreed understanding of what is necessary for successful transition was the main issue encountered in the study. Stakeholders in the children's education were not overly focused on the need to have a policy, strategies and standards to guide continuity, between home, Aoga Amata, school and community. Part of the issue is the language (Samoan or English) in which discussions are taking place. For this reason, a version of the present research will be prepared in Samoan and in the expectation that it will prompt constructive analysis by stakeholders in the Aoga Amata movements.

Early childhood education provisions are that the discretion of parents. It is therefore important that choices are made for reasons of philosophy, quality and value.

Second, an agreed set of strategies to ensure continuity should be mandated at least at the Aoga Amata and school community level. Several domains of transition will need attention in the mandate: administrative coordination, curriculum continuity, parent involvement, language maintenance, professional development, and coordination amongst support services. Of particular importance is an articulated curriculum from Aoga Amata through at least to the end of year two in the junior school, a coherent plan for maintaining home languages, and fresh initiatives for achieving parental involvement in child's education.

Third, incentive schemes are needed to encourage schools, Aoga staff, and parents to focus on transition issues. At the national level, funding may be needed to establish and monitor transition standards. The facilitating conditions for continuity are reasonably well understood - shared vision, strong local partnership between Aoga Amata and the school, and patience with development processes (Kagan and Newman 1998:371). Less well-understood are how to deal with factors constraining transition activity such as divergent policies, traditional school practices, and difficulties in establishing working partnerships amongst services.

Four, reconsideration must be given to the question of who is responsible for initiating policy and practices for improving the continuity of educational experiences for Samoan children. A natural forum for creating policy would be the Faalapotoga mo le Aoaoina o le Gagana I Aotearoa (FAGASA, the National Organization for Teaching and Learning the Samoan Language in Aotearoa).

At the regional level the Sosaiete a Aoga Amata Samoa I Aotearoa (SAASIA, the Samoan Aoga Amata Association in Aotearoa) may need to initiate professional development programmes that focus specifically on continuity issues. There is perhaps an important role for Aoga Amata staff, who have diplomas in teaching, to be working in junior classes on a nationally agreed transition programme. Choices should not be constrained by inequalities of funding, training, and alignment with primary education. There are a number of agencies already working in the area of quality assurance. These include the Early Childhood

Development, the Ministry of Education through professional development contracts, professional associations such as SAASIA (Sosaiete a Aoga Amata Samoa I Aotearoa), and FAGASA (Faalapotoga o le Aoaoina o le Gagana Samoa I Aoteroa), and Colleges of Education. There is therefore potential for a number of policy initiatives to be trialled for improving the transition practises for Aoga Amata children.

The parents interviewed in the study and the children and their teachers though carefully about the questions put to them. The care and reflection in their replies placed children at the centre of their concern and provided for the researcher a vision of a better education for Samoan speaking children.

The study has enabled me to utilise use of cultural methods in the collection of data and the conducting of interview procedures. As a Samoan researcher, I felt comfortable in carrying out research in the Samoan way, which showed tangible outcomes of participants' information as required to respond to the key research questions. Or future researches, I would be inclined to carry out the same methods again, but depending on the ethnicity background of the stakeholders.

Equity issues

Having read about the success of Te Kohanga Reo movement, and the Statistics from the Ministry of Education (1998) which outline the fast increase of pacific Islands children's enrolment in early childhood education services, it makes me wonder about how the government allocates funds to various government departments. For sure, the education sector does not seem to have equal distribution or allocation of funds to these areas, which are crying out loud for resources.

Please note that a copy of this research is obtainable from Victoria University Wellington, Early Childhood Development and Wellington College of Education libraries.

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